

*New Suicide Numbers Come During National Suicide Prevention Week*

**SCOTTSDALE** - With news that the Marine Corps witnessed a record number of suicides last year, U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell today recognized National Suicide Prevention week and continued to push for more veteran suicide prevention, outreach and awareness.

"It is important that we recognize National Suicide Prevention week, especially as we face an epidemic of suicide among veterans," said Mitchell, who serves as Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "Many of our returning veterans and those who served in past generations bear wounds that can't be seen and are difficult to diagnose. Too many continue to struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and are at risk for suicide. It's clear that we need to increase their outreach to these veterans."

Today, the Marine Corps reported that 52 Marines killed themselves last year, compared with 42 in 2008, leaving the Marine Corps with the highest rate of suicide of any U.S. military service. The Marine Corps announced they will start using a new buddy system to help prevent veteran suicides. [Source: [Los Angeles Times](#) , September 10, 2010]

Last month, the Army released a 15-month-long study that reported that in Fiscal Year 2009, 239 soldiers committed suicide in both the active duty and reserve force. Additionally, 146 soldiers died due to "high risk" behavior, including 74 drug overdoses. During the same time frame there were 1,713 suicide attempts. [Source: [CNN](#) , July 29, 2010]

In June, the Army experienced a record high number of suicides. USA Today reported that "the suicide rate among 18-to 29-year old men who've left the military has gone up significantly."

Specifically, according to The New York Times, veterans account for about one in five of the more than 30,000 suicides committed in the United States each year. [Source: [USA Today](#) , Jan. 11, 2010;

[New York Times](#)

, July 30, 2010]

Last month, Mitchell called on President Obama to address the needs of our troops and returning veterans and the struggles they face when they return home. [Source: [Mitchell Press Release](#) , August 30, 2010]

Mitchell has continually called on the VA to explain why they stopped airing a successful public service announcement (PSA) starring Forrest Gump star Gary Sinise that let veterans at risk for suicide know about the VA's suicide prevention hotline, and chaired a hearing examining the issue in July. [Source: [Mitchell Release](#) , July 14, 2010]

As of April 2010, the VA has reported nearly 7,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans, which were attributed to seeing the ads, PSAs, or promotional products. Additionally, referrals to VA mental health services increased. In Phoenix, the VA reported a 234 percent increase in calls to the suicide hotline within 30 days of the launch of its public awareness campaign. However, late last year, the VA told Mitchell that, despite the success, the PSAs had stopped airing. [Source: [Congressional Inquiry](#) , March 2010]

The suicide hotline is often the front line of the government's expanding efforts to deter suicide among veterans. [ [New York Times](#) , July 30, 2010]

Mitchell has repeatedly called upon the VA to increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. Out of an estimated veteran population of 23 million veterans, only about 8 million veterans are enrolled for care through the VA [Source: [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) , April 28, 2010]

Since 2007, Congressman Mitchell and the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations which he chairs, has been examining the epidemic of suicide rates among Veterans, and the VA's efforts to reach out to veterans at risk. [Sources: [Mitchell Release](#) , November 19, 2007; For additional information about the epidemic of veteran suicides: [CBS News](#) , November 13, 2007]

Until 2008, the VA had a self-imposed ban on TV advertising as a means to conduct outreach to veterans - including outreach to those at risk for suicide. Mitchell began calling upon the VA to reverse its long-standing self-imposed ban on television advertising and increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. In 2008, the VA reversed the ban, and launched a pilot public awareness campaign in Washington, DC to inform veterans and their families about where they can turn for help - which was ultimately expanded nationally. [Source: [CBS News](#) , July 14, 2008; [Mitchell Release](#) , June 18, 2008]

###